

## Policing America Through Research

In the Spring of my freshman year, I enrolled in ENGL 210: Race Criminality, and Punishment. What was superficially an Honors Expos II class very quickly became a delving into the world of the Prison Industrial Complex, something which, until this point, I was wholly unfamiliar with. In this class, we upended my previously held beliefs about criminality, and dove into the gritty historical underbelly of policing in America. Through texts ranging from French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault to political activist and scholar Angela Davis to *The Dark Knight Returns* writer and penciller Frank Miller, my knowledge of the institution of policing, as well as America's law enforcement history, deepened.

As the class began to edge closer to completion, I was approaching a semester's end with decades of dissension and complication in mind and the instructions for a research project in Canvas. Four month's worth of discussion on the problematic nature of policing left me pondering what would become a driving question in my research: if policing could create so much issue, is there a world in which we don't need policing at all?

My research began with assembling the viewpoints I wanted represented in my paper. Firstly, what is the dialogue within activist communities who are fighting for this type of reform? Secondly, what is the academic research show about efficacy and historical basis of police as an institution? To dig into these perspectives, I began using several search engines to establish some entry points into this research.

For the former sources—the somewhat more informal, less academically oriented texts such as activist groups Critical Resistance and L.E.A.P. — I used the texts from class as a point of reference to expand my research further. Angela Davis, author of the text *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, which we studied in class, was the perfect jumping off point to explore further into the activist-centered perspective. Through Davis' works and community organizing, I built on what was given to me in class, and broadened to include a more in-depth and expansive activist

approach to police reform, including work from community organizers and reform-oriented police themselves.

For the latter sources— the more scholarly of my selections, such as Cheeseman’s “Philadelphia Community Court Evaluation” and Fortier and Chettiar’s “Brennan Center for Justice” — I employed search engines such as the K-State Libraries SearchIt tool, as well as Google Scholar. The sources I collected from these searches not only provided didactic information in and of themselves, but additionally led me to more sources through the cited works in each of these texts. Through the works of these criminological scholars, I was able to trace back to the foundational texts which inform many studies in this field today—the predominant of which being Robert Reiner’s *The Politics of Police*.

Thus, I entered my next stage of research, which was facilitated through the use of K-State Libraries Interlibrary Loan. This invaluable tool enabled me to study firsthand the most influential theory on criminal law, texts which were a common theme through a significant number of my sources. Through Interlibrary Loan, I studied Reiner’s text—which became a crux of my final argument—as well two other works, Samuel Walker’s *The New World of Police Accountability* and Philip L. Reichel’s *Comparative Criminal Justice Systems: A Topical Approach*, two very informative texts that I ultimately did not exactly fit the scope of my paper.

The use of Interlibrary Loan and SearchIt as two of my more significant avenues of research came about because of the accessibility and reliability of both. From previous research on other projects, I had become acquainted with both services and knew that with either I would have world-class information in front of me in a matter of seconds or days. SearchIt provided me with a nearly comprehensive selection of existing research which I could use to bolster my own, and subsequently use to inform my Interlibrary Loan decisions. Through use of both, I grew in my abilities to identify relevant and reliable sources, as well as my ability to find additional research through the reliable sources I had previously identified, both of which are skills I’ve

employed in later projects. These tools also helped me to gain a consciousness of time management while doing research, as I became adjusted to the processing times of services like Interlibrary Loan. In research I do now, I am much more effectively able to approach my research in an organized and manageable way.

Another significant skill I garnered from this research experience was the ability to appropriately evaluate information, especially within a mix of scholarly and non-scholarly sources. Since issues surrounding policing hold such a fixed place in our present national dialogue, I wanted to be sure to include more culturally oriented sources, especially as points of reference in the discussion of police related problems. These type of sources include reporting from the *New York Times*, the *Miami Herald*, *CNN*, and even sources as traditionally informal as *YouTube*.

Through the scrutinizing abilities I developed in scouring the seemingly infinite source options the Libraries' SearchIt tool provides, I was able to apply a discerning lens to the more colloquial of my sources. This gave me the opportunity to evaluate these sources in a way which could still benefit my paper with valuable insight from those involved in these issues and reporting on it, without infecting my work with an unnecessary skewing, or simply false, perspective.

This research, overall, was enormously impactful on my transition into the academia of university. From establishing and developing an understanding of Library research tools—which has since further led me into other Library tools, such as the databases and subject experts—to bolstering my discerning abilities in evaluating sources, the project and the skills I took from it molded a steady base on which I am able pursue further research throughout my college career.